



News Release

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Common Tanning Myths Pale in Comparison to Skin Cancer Facts

There is no such thing as a healthy tan

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Recent data indicates that in 2004, 482 Utahns were diagnosed with melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. On average 62 Utahns die each year from this disease. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or a tanning bed is one of the most important preventable factors involved in the development of skin cancer.

“As the weather warms up and vacation season begins, many Utahns unsafely expose their skin to dangerous UV radiation because of commonly believed tanning myths,” says Kalynn Filion, health program specialist, UDOH. “The Utah Department of Health and the Utah Cancer Action Network (UCAN) want to shed light on these potentially fatal myths.”

Myth: Tanning gives skin a healthy glow.

Fact: There is no such thing as a healthy tan. Any change in your natural skin color is a sign of damage. Not only can tanning cause skin cancer, in the long run, too much exposure to the sun may change the skin’s texture, giving it a tough, leathery appearance. Up to 90% of the visible skin changes commonly attributed to aging are caused by sun exposure. A safer option for those who desire darker skin would be to use sunless tanning or bronzing products.

Myth: Getting a “base tan” by using a tanning bed is a safe way to start the summer and will protect the skin from sun damage.

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Fact: Tanning beds emit high intensity UV rays, which cause deep skin damage and over time are linked with the development of skin cancer. In addition, exposure to tanning salon rays increases damage caused by sunlight because ultraviolet light actually thins the skin, lowering its ability to heal. Women who use tanning beds more than once a month are 55 percent more likely to develop malignant melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer.

Myth: Sunscreen provides enough protection so that you can sunbathe or be outside in the sun much longer.

Fact: Sunscreens protect your skin by absorbing and/or reflecting UV rays but should not be used to increase sun exposure time. Although a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or high offers protection from sunburn, it does not block all of the sun's damaging rays. Using sunscreen doesn't mean it is safe to spend more time in the sun, especially when the UV Index is high.

According to the American Cancer Society, more than 1 million cases of basal or squamous cell cancers, most of which are highly curable, occur each year across the nation. Melanoma, which is far more serious, is expected to be diagnosed in nearly 60,000 people in 2007. Utah has consistently been ranked among the top 10 states for high rates of skin cancer due to its high altitude, predominantly fair-complexioned population and frequent sunny days.

Skin cancer is preventable when sun protection measures are used consistently. Sun protection measures include application of sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher 30 minutes before spending time outdoors, re-application of sunscreen every two hours, seeking shade, avoiding the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., and covering up by wearing hats, long sleeves, and sunglasses. Learn more at www.ucan.cc, or by calling 1-888-222-2542.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.